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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to analyze the perceptions of educators regarding the impact of grade retention on K-5 elementary students. Principals (N=384) and teachers (N=384) in K-5 elementary schools from 11 southern states were surveyed. The study included 169 responses from principals and 140 responses from teachers. The data revealed that teachers believed retention helped students' performance while principals believed retention hindered students' performance. Also, teachers believed that students performed according to their expectations during the second year in the same grade while principals believed that benefits of retention are not greater than the negative results. Study findings suggested: (1) students' physical maturity, self-concepts, and attitudes should be major considerations in the decision to retain a child; (2) promotion is more effective for increasing achievement and fostering personal, social, psychological, and emotional development; (3) promotion and retention policies should allow for teacher judgment and parental involvement; (4) retention allows students more time to mature; and (6) if a student is to be retained, it would be most beneficial educationally for him/her at the K-3 level. (Contains 21 data tables and 20 references.) (ND)

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THE IMPACT OF GRADE RETENTION ON K-5 ELEMENTARY STUDENTS: PERCEPTIONS OF EDUCATORS IN STATES SERVED BY THE SOUTHERN ASSOCIATION OF COLLEGES AND SCHOOLS

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THE IMPACT OF GRADE RETENTION ON K-5 ELEMENTARY STUDENTS: PERCEPTIONS OF EDUCATORS IN STATES SERVED BY THE SOUTHERN ASSOCIATION OF COLLEGES AND SCHOOLS

Introduction

In the mid-19th century, American schools were essentially ungraded. Students moved through the system by content mastery and not incremental grade level steps like first, second, and third (Beck, Cook, & Kearney, 1960). This soon changed because of the German influence on American scholars studying in Europe. Scholars were attracted to the graded elementary schools of that country and brought the concept to the United States. By 1870, every aspect of every school in the country was graded: buildings, textbooks, curricula, and pupils (Balow & Schwager, 1990).

Balow and Schwager (1990) also state that a premise of the graded school was that achievement would be enhanced if the curriculum were graded by year in school, if the teacher focused the instruction on the curriculum of that grade, and if pupils worked to master that curriculum. As soon as graded schools were introduced, it became obvious that some pupils mastered the curriculum with relative ease and that other students learned only with difficulty and failed to master any significant portion of the curriculum. The latter group posed a serious problem for the schools. The discipline and the effectiveness of instruction, it was thought, would be threatened if pupils were promoted without the necessary skills to succeed at the next level.

Retention in grade, or failure, was introduced as a solution. By 1900, retention in grade was a major problem in education, with the failure rate reaching as high as 50%,

and with adolescents frequently retained in primary grades. To reduce the impact of a full year of retention, semester, quarter, and subject retention were tried. With each change, the retention rate became higher (Beck, Cook, & Kearney, 1960).

With the effort to standardize education, the problem of students repeating a grade once, or more than once, became a common practice (Lindelow, 1982). In 1915, national figures showed retention rates for first graders varying from 2% to over 80%. Additionally, the fact that schools often "double promoted" or accelerated students led to a wide range of age variations in grade levels and caused high dropout rates (Brueckner, 1934). Promotion based on achievement or strict academic standards was not meeting individual needs (Stiles, 1983).

This trend led to a shift in promotion policies. During the depression years, educators became more aware of the importance of the social aspects of education. Social or automatic promotions gained educational acceptance (Thompson, 1980). The research during the 1930s, 1940s, and 1950s supported the social promotion movement. Studies indicated the following: (a) in order for a student to develop maximum abilities, success must be experienced; (b) failure or fear of failure inhibits development; (c) individual differences make a single set of academic standards impossible; (d) grade repetition does not ensure mastery of subject matter; (e) retained students represent additional operating costs; and (f) retention causes wide variations in classes with respect to age, physical and social maturity, and interests (Coffield & Bloomers, 1956).

Significance of the Study

Retention in grade is a major problem in education. Shephard and Smith (1990) state that 5 to 7% of public school children (about 2 children in every classroom of 30) are retained in the United States annually. At an annual rate of 6% year after year, the cumulative rate of nonpromotion is greater than 50%. It is estimated that by the 9th grade, approximately one half of all students in the United States have failed at least one grade or are no longer in school. Based on an annual retention rate of 6% and a per pupil cost of $4,051, it is estimated that the United States school districts spend nearly $10 billion a year to pay for the extra year of schooling necessitated by retaining 2.4 million students (Shephard & Smith, 1990).

The research has revealed that retaining students in the same grade for a second year will not produce long-term gains or positive results. To effectively reach those students who are not achieving during class each day, failed strategies and instructional techniques must be replaced by obtaining new information and new insights into approaches and programs that will produce positive results.

Pierson and Connell (1992) argue that grade retention impacts on students' academic achievement, self perceptions, and their engagement in school. Retained students have a difficult time performing as well as their peers, and most often their performance is lower than that of the younger children. Retained students are also less able to develop adaptive strategies for attaining or achieving success and hold negative beliefs about school.

In a recent meta-analysis of research, Holmes and Matthews (1984) located 63 controlled studies where retained students were followed up and compared to equally poor achieving students who went directly on to the next grade. Fifty-four studies showed overall negative effects from retention, even on measures of academic achievement. The results of this research showed that when retained children went on to the next grade, they actually performed more poorly on an average than if they had gone on without repeating.

Researchers have consistently found a significant relationship between grade retention and dropping out. Dropouts are five times more likely to have repeated a grade than are high school graduates. Students who repeat two grades have a probability of dropping out of nearly 100% (Association of California Urban School Districts, 1985).

In the past, these findings were ignored because poor achievement could be the explanation for both grade retention and dropping out. In a more recent study by Grissom and Shephard (1989) that examined the retention/dropout rate, students who repeated a year were 20 to 30% more likely to drop out of school, but African American males with identical achievement scores who repeated a year in school had a 75% chance of leaving school before graduation.

Retention not only has a negative effect on student achievement but on the emotional aspect of students as well. Yamamoto (1980), in a study of childhood stressors, revealed that children rated going blind or losing a parent as the two life threatening events that would be more stressful than being retained.

Many educators and the public find it difficult to give up this process. It seems that to do so would mean accepting or condoning shamefully deficient skills for many high school students. It also appears to be easier to credit research findings that retention harms self-esteem and increases the likelihood of dropping out than to believe the most critical findings--that retention worsens rather than improves the level of student achievement in years following the repeated year (Shephard & Smith, 1990).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to analyze the perceptions of educators in states served by The Southern Association of Colleges and Schools regarding the impact of grade retention on K-5 elementary students. The study involved principals and teachers from 11 states located in the southern region of the United States. The states included in the study were Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, and Virginia. Principals and teachers currently employed in K-5 elementary schools in school districts from these states were surveyed for this study. The study included 169 responses from principals and 140 responses from teachers.

The questionnaire was designed from information gathered through a comprehensive review of the literature regarding retention. The survey consisted of 37 questions divided into four sections: Section I was the demographic data about principals and teachers in K-5 elementary schools, Section II was demographic data concerning the make-up of principals' schools, Section III was perceptions of principals and teachers regarding the impact of grade retention on K-5 students, and Section IV was open-ended

narrative responses that elicited the experiences of principals and teachers regarding retained students.

Each item reflected positive or negative emphasis regarding how retention impacts students. Respondents were requested to express a level of agreement or disagreement. A choice of five possible responses could be considered. These choices ranged from strongly agree to strongly disagree.

Reasons for Retention and Related Studies

Retention, according to Dawson (1990), is the practice of requiring a student to repeat a particular grade or of delaying the entry to kindergarten or first grade of a child who is of appropriate chronological age. Light (1977) described retention as not permitting a student to advance to the next grade level with his classmates; failing, flunking, or keeping back.

A number of reasons or assumptions that have been used in the literature to support the concept of retention include academic achievement, immaturity, motivation, mastery of skills, extra year programs, and reduced dropout rate. Each reason is discussed in a separate section below.

Academic Achievement

One rationale for retention places the integrity of the school as its central focus. It is based on the argument that grade standards signifying definite levels of educational development are needed and that pupils should be required to attain these standards before being promoted. If these standards are adhered to, all students will perform at or above grade level, and teachers can then teach the grade level curriculum to pupils ready

to learn. Therefore, retention will not contribute to the development of poor attitudes toward learning (Beck, Cook, & Kearney, 1960).

Immaturity

Immaturity is also used as a rationale for retaining students, especially in the primary grades. Immaturity may be chronological youngness, or it may be that the students' behavior or developmental age is below his or her chronological age (Scott & Ames, 1969). In 1968, Chase studied 65 students in the first, second, and third grades who were considered by their teachers to be immature but otherwise basically normal. He conducted interviews with teachers and parents to assess the effe ts of a year's retention. Teachers felt that repeating a grade had met the needs of 75% of these students and that it had produced no emotional upset in 78% of them. Parents overwhelmingly felt that the retention experience had produced improved social and emotional adjustment in their children.

Motivation

Motivation has also been offered as a reason for maintaining a retention policy. If students believe that they are going to be promoted year after year and that they will eventually receive a high school diploma regardless of their academic skills or performance, then there is little motivation for them to work hard in school. If the threat of retention is present, then students will try hard in order to avoid being retained (Chafe, 1984).

Mastery of Skills

The problem of how to ensure that students master appropriate skills and knowledge while passing from grade to grade is a dominant concern of educators, parents, community members, and students. Retention, however, still remains the major strategy used by educators as a remedy for academic failure. Traditionally, the practice of grade retention has been viewed as a solution by providing additional instruction to low-achieving students while lending meaning to promotion standards. This practice persists despite reviews of the literature that show little or no academic achievement benefits from retention (Stiles, 1983).

Extra-Year Programs

Other methods or reasons to retain students are through the use of extra-year programs. The assumption for the use of extra-year programs is that an extra year prior to first grade will cause students to mature or acquire reading readiness skills in a way that prevents stress and failure. Extra-year programs may be termed in several forms--developmental kindergarten, which is before kindergarten; transitional classroom, which is before first grade; and kindergarten for a second time (Stiles, 1983).

Transitional, alternative, or prefirst grades are another way school districts provide an extra-year of instruction for children before first grade. The programs are for students who are not ready for first grade but are too advanced to repeat kindergarten. Generally, the students do not have the motivation level or basic skills to do satisfactory first grade work. The program provides an opportunity to concentrate on these areas and provide special attention to the individual student through small classes. Most of these

programs are full day programs, similar to regular first grade. In other programs, the student is in a regular kindergarten class for half a day and the transitional class for the other half. At the end of the transitional first grade, the child normally is promoted to the first grade (Stiles, 1983).

Reduced Dropout Rate

Some educators advocate grade retention based on the assumption that the retention will make students less at risk for dropping out of school. Parent and educator beliefs in the value of retention in the short run cannot survive the longitudinal studies of the causes of school dropout. Retention shows no clear benefits for students in terms of academic gains, personal and social growth, or improvement in attitudes toward school. The policy of retention, however, has increasingly been criticized for having negative effects in all of these areas and has become increasingly associated with increasing the risk of dropping out of school (Sherwood, 1993).

Schools advocate grade retention on the assumption that the schools that retain high numbers of students are effective schools because they have high standards for academic achievement. The assumption is that this standard will ensure the value of the system's high school diploma. In keeping with the concept that high rates of retention indicate high standards, some people believe that such standards must be maintained even if they impose educational and personal hardships on many children (Dill, 1993).

Subjects of the Study

The subjects of this study were selected from the population of principals and teachers from accredited schools in the region served by the Southern Association of

Colleges and Schools (SACS). The principals were selected randomly, by state, from lists of elementary principals provided by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools. The teachers were selected from a purposeful sample. Teachers were selected from each of the schools from which the principals were selected. There was one teacher from each of the selected schools. The teacher representative of the professional organization of each selected school was identified to participate in the study. There are approximately 800 school districts in the 11 states to be used in this study. There are 2,000 K-5 accredited elementary schools in these school districts. According to Krejcie and Morgan (1970), the total sample for a population of this number should be 322 subjects. This study, therefore, utilized a randomly selected group of 322 principals and a purposefully selected group of 322 teachers from the same schools. Subjects were randomly selected by using Babbie's (1990) table of random numbers. A 20% increase of the minimum number of 322 participants was used to ensure that an adequate sample responded to the survey. Therefore, the sample group consisted of 384 principals and teachers. The total number in the same group was 768.

Presentation and Analysis of Data

A total of 384 principals and 384 teachers received surveys. Of the 384 surveys sent to principals and teachers, principals completed and returned 169 surveys (44%). Teachers completed and returned 140 surveys (36%). Of the total number of questionnaires sent out, a total of 309 (40%) were completed and returned. Tables 1 through 8 provide frequencies and percentages of demographic information concerning the participants.

Table 1

Respondents of the Instrument

Group	Number distributed	Number returned	Percentage responding
Public school administrators	384	169	44
Public school teachers	384	140	36
Total	768	309	40

Table 2

Highest Degree Held

	Principals		Teachers	
Degree	No.	%	No.	%
B.A. or B.S.	0	0%	56	40
M.A. or M.S.	74	44	72	51
A.A. or Ed.S.	70	41	12	9
Ed.D. or Ph.D.	25	15	0	0
Total	169	100	140	100

Table 3

Gender

	Principals		Teachers	
Gender	No.	%	No.	%
Male	77	46	4	3
Female	92	54	136	97
Total	169	100	140	100

Table 4

Current Employment

	Principals		Teachers	
State	No.	%	No.	%
Alabama	30	17.8	22	15.7
Florida	21	12.4	18	12.9
Georgia	35	20.7	33	23.6
Kentucky	5	3.0	2	1.4
Louisiana	7	4.1	8	5.7
Mississippi	3	1.8	4	2.9
North Carolina	25	14.8	22	15.7
South Carolina	14	8.3	10	7.1
Tennessee	8	4.7	5	3.6
Texas	7	4.1	5	3.6
Virginia	14	8.3	11	7.9
Total	169	55.0	140	45.0
N = 309		100.0		100.0

Table 5

Ethnicity

	African Americans		Caucasians	
Group	No.	%	No.	%
Principals	36	12.0	133	43.0
Teachers	19	6.0	121	39.0
Total	55	18.0	254	82.0

Table 6

Size of School

Size of School	No.	%
1-500	78	46.0
> 500	90	54.0
Total	168	100.0

Table 7

Free and Reduced Lunches

Free & Reduced Lunches	No.	%
0-10%	19	12.0
11-50%	81	49.0
> 50%	68	39.0
Total	168	100.0

Table 8

Minority Students

Minority Students	No.	%
0-10%	53	32.0
11-50%	74	44.0
> 50%	39	24.0
Total	166	100.0

Analyses of Hypotheses

Null Hypothesis 1. There shall be no significant difference among the teachers from the 11 states served by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools regarding their perceptions of the impact of grade retention on K-5 students.

Null Hypothesis 2. There shall be no significant difference among the principals from the 11 states served by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools regarding their perceptions of the impact of grade retention on K-5 students.

Null Hypothesis 3. There shall be no significant difference between teachers and principals from states served by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools regarding their perceptions of the impact of grade retention of K-5 students.

Null Hypothesis 4. There shall be no significant difference in the perceptions of teachers from the states served by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools regarding the impact of grade retention on K-5 students based on the following demographic variables: (a) gender, (b) ethnicity, and (c) level of education.

Table 9

Analysis of Teachers' Perceptions

State	N	Mean
Alabama	21	3.07
Florida	18	3.32
Georgia	28	3.36
Kentucky	2	3.50
Louisiana	8	3.20

State	N	Mean
Mississippi	3	3.08
North Carolina	21	3.20
South Carolina	10	3.16
Tennessee	4	3.25
Texas	4	3.35
Virginia	9	3.19

An analysis of variance (ANOVA) was used to determine the means of all respondents. Table 10 presents the results of the ANOVA.

Table 10

ANOVA Analysis of Teachers' Perceptions

Source	DF	SS	MS	Calculated F	Critical F
Among	10	1.547757	.1547757	1.09	1.91
Within Error	117	16.562230	.1415575		
Total	127	17.109987			

Because the calculated F (1.09) was less than the critical F (.05, 10, 117) value of 1.91 (Hinkle, Wiersma, & Jurs, 1988) required for statistical significance, no significance difference existed at the .05 level among teachers from the 11 states served by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools regarding their perceptions of the impact of grade retention on K-5 students.

Table 11

Analysis of Principals' Perceptions

State	N	Mean
Alabama	25	3.48
Florida	20	3.57
Georgia	31	3.67
Kentucky	5	3.40
Louisiana	7	3.24
Mississippi	3	3.20
North Carolina	24	3.43
South Carolina	11	3.39
Tennessee	7	3.38
Texas	7	3.49
Virginia	13	3.48

An analysis of variance (ANOVA) was used to determine the means of all respondents.

Table 12

ANOVA Analysis of Principals' Perceptions

Source	DF	SS	MS	Calculated F	Critical F
Among	10	1.844981	.184498	1.17	1.83
Within Error	142	22.307511	.157095		
Total	152	24.152492			

Because the calculated F (1.17) was less than the critical F (.05, 10, 142) value of 1.83 (Hinkle, Wiersma, & Jurs, 1988) required for statistical significance, no significant difference existed at the .05 level among principals from the 11 states served by the

Association of Colleges and Schools regarding their perceptions of the impact of grade retention on K-5 students.

Table 13

Analysis of Teachers' and Principals' Perceptions

	Principals		Teachers	
State	N	Mean	N	Mean
Alabama	25	3.48	21	3.07
Florida	20	3.57	18	3.32
Georgia	31	3.64	28	3.36
Kentucky	5	3.46	2	3.50
Louisiana	7	3.24	8	3.19
Mississippi	3	3.20	3	3.08
North Carolina	24	3.43	21	3.20
South Carolina	11	3.39	10	3.16
Tennessee	7	3.38	4	3.25
Texas	7	3.49	4	3.35
Virginia	13	3.49	9	3.19

An analysis of variance (ANOVA) Factorial Design was used to compare the means of the respondents. The Factorial Design of the ANOVA allowed for two independent variables to be analyzed simultaneously in a single analysis. Table 14 presents the results of the ANOVA.

Table 14

ANOVA (Factorial Design) Analysis of Teachers' and Principals' Perceptions

Source	DF	SS	MS	Calculated F	Critical F
Among	21	7.87738	.375113	2.50	1.52
Within Error	259	38.86974	.150076		
Total	280	46.74712			

Because the calculated F (2.50) was greater than the critical F (.05, 21, 259) value of 1.52 (Hinkle, Wiersma, & Jurs, 1988) required for statistical significance, Null Hypothesis 3 was rejected. Therefore, a significant difference at the .05 level existed between principals and teachers from states served by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools regarding their perceptions of the impact of grade retention on K-5 students.

To determine specifically which groups differed, a Tukey analysis was conducted. According to Hinkle, Wiersma, and Jurs (1988), the Tukey method, often called the HSD (Honestly Significant Difference) test, was designed to make all pairwise comparisons while maintaining the experimentwise error rate at the preestablished level. A review of the results revealed that there were significant differences between the means of teachers and principals from the states of Georgia and Mississippi.

To analyze Hypothesis 3 further, a comment matrix of the narrative responses of principals and teachers from the 11 states was completed. Five questions (Items 35, 36, and 37) measured these responses.

The results from these questions revealed that there was a difference in the responses of teachers and principals from the states of Georgia and Mississippi as compared to teachers and principals from other states used in this study. These were the only states that indicated a difference in the perceptions of teachers and principals regarding the impact of grade retention on K-5 students. Georgia, however, was the only state from which both teachers and principals believed that grade retention had a negative impact on K-5 students.

Of the 35 principals who responded from the state of Georgia, 23 (66%) of the group believed that retention hindered students' performance, 20 (57%) stated that students did not perform according to their expectations during the second year in the same grade, and 19 (54%) believed that the benefits of retention were not greater than the negative results.

Of the 33 teachers who responded to the questions, 17 (52%) believed that retention hindered student performance, 17 (52%) stated that students did not perform according to their expectations during the second year in the same grade, and 17 (52%) believed that the benefits of retention are not greater than the negative results. Table 15 presents an analysis of the principals' and teachers' perceptions from the state of Georgia regarding their impact on K-5 students.

Table 15

An Analysis of Georgia's Principals' and Teachers' Perceptions Regarding Retention

	Principals		Teachers	
Item/Response	N	%	N	%
35				
Retention hindered	23	66.0	17	52.0
Retention helped	5	14.0	13	39.0
Undecided or incomplete	7	20.0	3	9.0
36				
Did not meet expectations	20	57.0	17	52.0
Met expectations	5	14.0	13	39.0
Undecided or incomplete	10	29.0	3	9.0
37				
Benefits not greater than negative results	19	54.3	17	52.0
Benefits greater than negative results	4	11.4	13	39.0
Undecided or incomplete	12	34.3	3	9.0

To examine the issue further, the narrative responses of the three questionnaire Items 35, 36, and 37 were analyzed according to the principals' and teachers' perceptions from the 11 states served by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools regarding their perceptions of the impact of grade retention on K-5 students.

Of the 169 principals that responded, 75 (44%) believed that retention hindered students' performance, 70 (41%) stated that students did not perform according to their expectations during the second year in the same grade, and 67 (40%) believed that the benefits of retention are not greater than the negative results.

Of the 140 teachers that responded to the survey, 81 (58%) believed that retention helped students' performance, 80 (57%) stated that students performed according to their

expectations during the second year in the same grade, and 76 (54%) of the teachers believed that the benefits of retention are greater than the negative results.

The responses from the narrative comments indicated that principals' and teachers' perceptions from the 11 states served by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools were significantly different regarding the impact of grade retention on K-5 students. The analysis of principals' perceptions revealed that principals from the 11 states served by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools believed that grade retention was not an effective alternative for at-risk students. The analysis of teachers' perceptions revealed that teachers' from the 11 states served by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools, however, believed that retention was an effective alternative for at-risk students.

Table 16

Analysis of Teachers' Perceptions Regarding the Impact of Grade Retention Based on Gender

Group	N	Mean	%
Male	4	3.61	3.0
Female	124	3.22	97.0

A t test was used to compare the survey means of all respondents. Table 17 illustrates the results of the t test.

Table 17

T Test Analysis of Teachers' Perceptions Regarding the Impact of Grade Retention Based on Gender

Calculated value of T	Critical value of T	DF
2.04	1.960	123, 3

Because the calculated t (2.04) was greater than the critical t (.05, 123, 3) value of 1.960 (Hinkle, Wiersma, & Jurs, 1988) required for statistical significance, Null Hypothesis 4 (gender) was rejected. A significant difference at the .05 level existed between males and females regarding the impact of grade retention on K-5 students.

Table 18

Analysis of Teachers' Perceptions Regarding the Impact of Grade Retention Based on Ethnicity

Group	N	Mean	%
African-Americans	18	3.12	14.0
Caucasians	110	3.28	86.0

A t test was used to compare the survey means of all respondents. Table 19 illustrates the results of the t test.

Table 19

T Test Analysis of Teachers' Perceptions Regarding the Impact of Grade Retention Based on Ethnicity

Calculated value of T	Critical value of T	DF
-1.42	-1.960	109, 17

Because the calculated t (-1.42) was less than the critical t (.05, 109, 17) value of -1.960 (Hinkle, Wiersma, & Jurs, 1988) required for statistical significance, Null Hypothesis 4 (ethnicity) was not rejected. A significant difference at the .05 level did not exist between African-Americans and Caucasians regarding their perceptions of the impact of grade retention on K-5 students.

Table 20

Analysis of Teachers' Perceptions Regarding the Impact of Grade Retention Based on the Level of Education

Group	N	Mean	%
B.A. or B.S.	53	3.18	41.0
M.A. or M.S.	65	3.25	51.0
A.A. or Ed.S.	10	3.41	8.0
Ed.D. or Ph.D.	0	0.00	00.0
Total	128		

An analysis of variance (ANOVA) was used to determine the means of all respondents. Table 21 presents the results of the ANOVA.

Table 21

ANOVA Analysis of Teachers' Perceptions Regarding the Impact of Grade Retention Based on the Level of Education

Calculated value of F	Critical value of F	DF
1.82	3.07	2, 125

Because the calculated F (1.82) was less than the critical F (.05, 2, 125) value of 3.07 (Hinkle, Wiersma, & Jurs, 1988) required for statistical significance, Null Hypothesis 4

(level of education) was not rejected. A significant difference at the .05 level did not exist concerning the level of education among teachers regarding their perceptions of the impact of grade retention on K-5 students.

Summary of Findings

Narrative responses of principals and teachers indicated the following:

1. Teachers believed that retention helped students' performance while principals believed that retention hindered students' performance.

2. Teachers believed that students performed according to their expectations during the second year in the same grade while principals believed that students did not perform to their expectations during the second year in the same grade.

3. A majority of the teachers believed that the benefits of retention are greater than the negative results while many of the principals believed that the benefits of retention are not greater than the negative results.

Conclusions

Based on the findings, the following conclusions resulted from the study:

1. Teachers and principals do not share the same perceptions regarding the positive and negative impact of retention on K-5 students.

2. While the findings revealed that teachers and principals do not share the same perceptions regarding the positive and negative impact of retention on K-5 students, the findings contributed to the following conclusions:

a. Students' physical maturity, self-concepts, and attitudes should be major consideration when deciding whether or not to retain a child.

b. Promotion is more effective for increasing achievement and fostering personal, social, psychological, and emotional development.

c. Cooperative learning groups and heterogeneous grouping practices can create a climate for success for at-risk students.

d. Promotion and retention policies should allow for teacher judgment and parental involvement.

e. Retention helps students have adequate time to mature.

f. If a student is to be retained, it would be most beneficial educationally for him/her at the primary level--K-3.

Recommendations for Further Study

Based upon the literature and findings of this study, recommendations for further studies are as follows:

1. A qualitative study should be conducted among principals and teachers to determine their actions, practices, and behaviors when retention decisions regarding students are considered.

2. A study similar to this study should be conducted which focuses on middle and secondary students.

3. A national study focusing on Grade K-5 elementary students should be conducted to determine whether similar results will occur.

4. A study that focuses on the attitudes of parents regarding the impact of retention of students should be conducted.

Implications for Educational Decision Makers

The results of this study, based upon the literature and findings, provide a framework for administrative actions by principals, superintendents, supervisors, and board members. The following actions are recommended:

1. Interview students at the high school level who have been retained at the elementary level and record their perceptions regarding the effects that retention at the elementary level had on their future performance.

2. Review the cumulative record files of students in the school district who dropped out of school and record the number of years and percentage of students who dropped out who had been retained at the elementary, middle, or secondary level.

3. Provide faculty and staff members with inservice training regarding the findings of the research literature concerning retention to aid in visualizing and conceptualizing the long-term results of retention.

4. Design a parental involvement program for the school or school district to encourage parents' participation in the education of their children.

5. Organize a committee of teachers, parents, students, and community members to assess the needs of at-risk students and provide strategies, resources, and funds for creative programs to meet these needs.

6. Structure the curriculum to provide the same program for the at-risk child that is provided for the gifted child.

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